

ASIA MINOR AMPULLAE: A CLASS OF THEIR OWN?

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ABSTRACT

Two practices of art historical research currently distort the study of Asia Minor ampullae: conflating the Asia Minor ampullae with St. Menas flasks and applying sweeping models of “pilgrimage art” to ampullae. This study examines and overturns both interpretive issues. I deconstruct the predominant interpretative model (the *locus sanctus* model), which relies on iconographic and localized notions of “sacred mimesis” and “contagion” to determine the circumstances of production, distribution, and social meaning of Asia Minor ampullae. Formal, visual, and contextual analysis of published objects and catalogued ampullae from Sardis, which focuses on materiality and reception, disassociate the Asia Minor corpus from that of Menas. By introducing the concept of “infinite divinity,” I free the Asia Minor ampullae from the absolute locative conditions of the *locus sanctus* model and provide an alternate understanding of their connection to sacred travel and devotion in late antiquity.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jessica Plant was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 2015, she earned a BA, *summa cum laude*, in Classical Civilizations and Art History from the University of Minnesota. She has participated in the Alberese Archaeological Project in Tuscany and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis. While pursuing her Master's degree, she worked as a teaching assistant for the Departments of Classics and Anthropology at Cornell University. Since joining Cornell's History of Art program in 2016, she has continued her studies of the material culture of the late antique Mediterranean as a PhD student.

To my family.

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Introduction: Asia Minor Ampullae

Late antique Asia Minor ampullae take their name from the Smyrna vicinity, where the railway engineer and antique enthusiast Paul Gaudin reportedly first unearthed over 40, now housed in the Louvre (Ill. 1).¹ Asia Minor ampullae are small lentoid terracotta vessels, often adorned with impressed figural and non-figural decorations. They possess a distinct morphology, with bodies that taper into narrow necks and slightly flaring rims. Two holes pierce the shoulders on either side, providing handles for wear or suspension. When Gaudin began donating ampullae to the Louvre in the late nineteenth century, the Société des Antiquaires de France identified them as *ampoules à eulogie* based on comparisons with other early Christian pilgrim souvenirs – that is, the Société classified the flasks as containers to hold *eulogiai*, or “blessings,” an offshoot of “pilgrimage art.”² Because ampullae housed in museums worldwide rarely have precise provenance, they raise a number of interpretative challenges to scholars, who in turn, reify recurring assumptions based on iconographic analysis. For example, an ampulla’s catalogue entry from the British Museum briefly describes the flask’s form and iconography (Ill. 2 and 3):

Pottery ampulla of orange fabric with oval body, cylindrical neck and pierced shoulder; decorated on one side with the seated figure of a bearded evangelist holding a stylus and a book; in front of him, a column-shaped object, perhaps a table; on the reverse, a long-haired bearded figure holding a book and flanked by two palm-branches.³

The museum bought the ampulla in 1883 from the Rev. Greville John Chester and lists Ephesus as its place of production and findspot from the sixth century. It is unclear how Ephesus was determined as the production site and findspot, whether by excavation or iconographic analysis. Two tangled interpretative issues create this uncertainty: firstly, traditional interpretations based on iconographic analysis tend to identify the place of production and distribution of flasks as a specific *locus sanctus*, with

¹ Metzger (1981: 7, 41-58) and see Erism (1986: 37-45). Paul Gaudin donated the ampullae from 1896 and 1920. Gaudin began excavating Aphrodisias when he was director of the Smyrna-Kassabra railroad in 1904 and continued in 1905. These excavations unearthed impressive finds, but were poorly recorded and the antiquities discovered were widely dispersed. Thus while they are assumed to have come from the vicinity of Smyrna, it is unclear whether they were excavated there as per the railroad construction, during his excavations at Aphrodisias, or bought elsewhere.

² Michon (1899); Anderson (2004: 79).

³ British Museum Collection Database (1883,0808.1) Rev. Greville John Chester sold at least nine clay flasks to the British Museum in the late nineteenth century, three of which are the ‘Asia Minor’ type; Dalton (1901: 159, no. 912).

appropriately related iconography; in this case, the British Museum identified the figures holding books as Evangelists, categorizing the figures as St. John and tying the ampulla to his shrine at Ephesus.⁴

Secondly, traditional interpretations conflate the Asia Minor ampullae with another group of “pilgrim flasks,” namely, the Menas flasks, termed for their connection to St. Menas’ shrine in the Maryut desert, which seem to adhere to this *locus-sanctus* model.⁵

This study examines and over-turns both interpretive issues. I deconstruct the *locus-sanctus* model, which previously relied on Gary Vikan’s notions of “sacred mimesis” and “contagion” for ascertaining the production, distribution, and social meaning of Asia Minor ampullae. Formal, visual, and contextual analysis, which focuses on the materiality and reception of ampullae, dissociates the Asia Minor corpus from that of Menas.⁶ This investigation and its subsequent implications problematize monolithic notions of the pilgrimage souvenir. Once freed from the absolute locative conditions of “sympathetic magic” and “contagion” models by Heather Hunter-Crawley’s concept of “infinite divinity,” Asia Minor ampullae provide an alternate understanding of sacred travel and devotion in late antiquity.

⁴ The Museum lists “Representations of St. John the Evangelist” as an alternative name for the object. It is entirely possible that Ephesus was a place of production and distribution, but no moulds, kilns, or substantial assemblages have been discovered in Ephesus. See Robert (1994) for his account of buying an ampulla on the road near Ephesus in the 1980’s.

⁵ See Dalton’s (1901) combination of all late antique clay ampullae.

⁶ Using theories of “materiality” and “embodiment,” especially the terms “categoryness” and “affordances.” I use embodiment, as a way of describing being-in-the-world, to problematize modern concepts of “pilgrim” and “ritual space.” “Categoryness,” from Van Oyen (2016: 9) is an index of distinctness, which allows me to critically reevaluate the homogeneity and salience of the Asia Minor corpus; object affordances, or the notion that the properties of objects, including their materials, grant them certain outcomes, in order to rematerialize an ampulla’s tangible properties. See Gibson (1979); Gell (1998: 22-23); the term has developed critically in Materiality and Cultural Studies, owing much to its interest in the “materiality turn” in archaeology see also Knappett (2005; 2012: 191).



Illustration 1. Asia Minor type ampullae displayed in the Ephesus Archaeological Museum, Selçuk.



Illustrations 2 and 3: Front and back of the “Representations of St. John the Evangelist” ampulla. British Museum.

Background

The main interpretative issues plaguing the study of Asia Minor ampullae arise from two strands of art historical research: the practices of cataloguing early Christian antiquities and conflating ampulla studies with the larger themes of “pilgrimage art.” Dalton’s 1901 *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities* of the British Museum’s collection provides an early twentieth century example of such classifications.⁷ Dalton divided the antiquities based on material typologies and formal sub-categories, thus classifying all

⁷ Dalton (1901: 154 – 159).

“pilgrims’ flasks” as a subcategory of early Christian pottery from the fourth to sixth centuries.⁸ The classification of “pilgrims’ flasks” subsumes the Asia Minor group (listed as “oval flasks”). Catherine Metzger (1981) was the first to systematically study the Asia Minor group as a separate sub-category of *ampoules à eulogie*.⁹ She distinguished the Asia Minor group based on their formal and decorative characteristics and general geographic findsites (smaller, oval flasks, with two pierced holes; mostly from the general Smyrna vicinity, gifted by Gaudin). Within the Asia Minor group, she developed ten iconographical categories (table 1).¹⁰

Given these issues with cataloguing late antique (fourth to sixth century) pilgrims’ flasks, scholars continue to conflate Asia Minor ampullae with the Menas ampullae, interpreting them through broader explanations of “pilgrimage art.” These explanations rely heavily on iconographic and literary analysis, and more specifically, Gary Vikan’s models of “sacred mimesis” and “contagion.”¹¹ Over the course of three decades, Vikan has developed these two explanations of pilgrimage “souvenirs.” In the first case of sacred mimesis, Vikan argues that images on *eulogiai* allowed a pilgrim’s “mimetic identification” with a saintly event or person, so that “the mere possession of an object bearing an *appropriate* image” realized their protective powers.¹² When a pilgrim *looked* at the memento and the associated image, she was transported by the memory of her travels and protected by the power of the iconographical model. Vikan also argues that the “power of [the] localized sacred (to heal, to save, to protect) could be transferred through touch,” as a contagion.¹³ Relying heavily on literary and iconographic analysis, “sacred mimesis” especially tends to dematerialize objects and separates form

⁸ More so than any other classification (such as lamps or gems), ampullae’s material, formal, and decorative properties are conflated with their ritual function. Dalton (1901: 154) notes that most of the flasks come from St. Menas’ shrine.

⁹ Metzger (1981). Her study covers the 59 Asia Minor type ampullae and 97 of Menas. Other museums with Asia Minor ampullae include: the Byzantine Museum in Athens, the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, the British Museum, the Princeton Art Museum, the Pesaro Museum, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Dumbarton Oaks collection, and the Beirut archaeological museum.

¹⁰ Metzger (1981: 41 -54).

¹¹ For the most recent reiteration, see Vikan (2010: 24-20).

¹² Ibid., (27-29) emphasis my own. Vikan describes “sympathetic magic” as “the belief that a mimetic assumption of identity brings with it a corresponding assumption of the protector, power, or healing associated with the model,” akin to interpretations of Roman magical gems through the magic of persuasive analogy. Vikan relies heavily on Saints’ Lives, especially Theodoret’s work on Simeon the Stylite.

¹³ Ibid., (25).

from matter.¹⁴ Thus, in these two explanations, the visual powers of *eulogiai* are flattened into an iconographic system of mimetic identification and the tangible powers are localized into concentrated people, places, and objects. Scholars use these explanations to connect “appropriate” iconography on *eulogiai* to specific saint’s shrines, to construct an authenticating model of *eulogiai* production and distribution, henceforth the “*locus sanctus*” model.¹⁵ These explanations seem to work for the Menas flasks; most have an image of the named saint in *orans* and original archaeological evidence supported the general production and distribution of the flasks onsite at Abu Mina (Ill. 4).

Yet on closer archaeological examination, these assumptions do not fully explain the production of the Menas flasks, and they cannot explain the diverse decoration and archaeological findspots of the Asia Minor corpus.¹⁶ They also fail to account for the material presence and power of clay ampullae. For these reasons, I dissociate the Asia Minor corpus from that of the Menas, arguing that each displays an independent trajectory. I also employ Heather Hunter-Crawley’s concept of “infinite divinity,” which argues that ritual experiences reveal divine power, which does not diminish over time and space or across objects.¹⁷ Thus, “infinite divinity” exposes the potential affective powers of ampullae without relying on “appropriate” iconography and concentrated localized power. Building on recent archaeological studies of ampullae, which explore their socio-economic and ritual dimensions, especially the works of William

¹⁴ Though the “contagion” model may seemingly counterbalance this dematerializing tendency, Vikan’s consistent reliance on literary evidence and iconography makes his analysis more focused on the visual experience, over the tangible, and relies on a system of “diminishing divinity,” which Hunter-Crawley (2012: 150) argues against in her development of “infinite divinity.”

¹⁵ See Foskolou (2012), for an adaptation of Vikan’s arguments.

¹⁶ Though many made arguments for production sites and social meanings based on these ideas of appropriate iconography such as Duncan-Flowers (1990), who connected the frequently occurring ‘Evangelist’ type to the shrine of St. John the Evangelist near Ephesus, based on textual descriptions; Campbell (1988: 544), who argues sold by travelling merchants to ‘Armchair pilgrims,’ and was the first to suggest a secondary market for this corpus, albeit still relying on a close iconographic analysis and modern expectations of how the relationships between a *locus sanctus* and images *should* be represented, and see Anderson (2004: 80, 89) dismissing this claim; Maeir and Strauss (1995) rely on iconography to reveal origins; even Heather Hunter-Crawley (2013: 193) assumes a connection between the so-called Evangelist scenes and Ephesus.

¹⁷ Hunter-Crawley (2012, 2013).

Anderson, Marcus Rautman, and Hunter-Crawley, I offer an alternative understanding of the Asia Minor corpus.¹⁸

Table 1. *Asia Minor Type ampullae: Iconographic types in the Louvre*

Iconographic Type	Number of Ampullae
Crosses	18
People under arches	9
Standing saints and Evangelic scenes	7
Horsemen	6
Busts	5
Floral or vegetal motifs	4
Shells	4
People with books	3
Animals	2
Head (special type)	1



Illustration 4. A “standard” Menas flask featuring the saint in *orans* flanked by two camels, encircled by dots. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“Authentication”: *Eulogiai* Production and consumption

The production of Menas flasks at Abu Mina offer a strong case to support the *locus sanctus* authentication model, but a flask hoard found in Alexandria problematizes this claim. Material analysis of

¹⁸ Including Anderson’s (2004) important study on Asia Minor ampullae, and his works on ampulla’s religious/votive contexts (2007a) and the economic implications for the distribution patterns of Menas flasks (2007b); Rautman (2005, 2013); Hunter-Crawley (2012, 2013); as well as the growing body of interdisciplinary pilgrimage studies is generating more critical conversations amongst literary sources, socio-economical factors, and material culture such as Brown (2014); Kristensen (2012); and Caner (2006).

Simeon the Elder's tokens found at Qal'at Seman further deconstruct the "souvenir" object category and introduces the concepts of widespread production and distribution.

Kauffmann excavated hundreds of Menas flasks at Abu Mina, some of which concretely connected the saint's shrine with flask production. For example, a set of flasks found *in situ* in a collapsed kiln provides the smoking-gun connection to link the Menas flasks to the site.¹⁹ Manufacturing processes and material analyses also support the production of Menas flasks at Abu Mina.²⁰ However, another more recent hoard discovered in Alexandria complicates the notion of Abu Mina's flask monopoly. By the 1980s, around 150 Menas flasks were discovered at Kom-el Dikka, located in a neighborhood of Alexandria, which, given the number of terracottas, bone, and ivory carvings, was also a workshop district.²¹ The large numbers of flasks suggest that they were also made in the Alexandrian workshops, or at the very least collected and distributed in the area. Christopher Haas even suggests that a savvy merchant bought and sold flasks here along the pilgrimage route to make a profit.²²

However, other archaeological evidence from other *eulogiai* reveals similar patterns.²³ So-called Simeon tokens reportedly found at Qal'at Seman were not necessarily made at the site. Martine Gerard and associates have examined the correlation between the Simeon tokens and the earth at the Elder

¹⁹ Maraval (1936: 212); Hunter-Crawley (2013: 190). Though this does not exclude other production sites, we know a fair amount of what seems to be a thriving local industry – small jars/amphorae appeared to have been manufactured on site, as well as oil lamps, and small vessels shaped as heads (though little is reported on these objects). Over a dozen wine presses suggest that wine was also produced for market, although amphorae sealed with the image of St. Menas, were made of a Nile mud not available in the region – to quote Grossman (1998: 299) "it is thus not to be excluded that somewhere in the Nile Valley an *emporium* for the commerce of Abu Mina was situated." Additionally, images of Menas flasks in museums display visually different clay fabrics.

²⁰ Hunter-Crawley (2013: 189) though chemical residue analysis had mixed results – while some flasks probably held oils, the results were inconclusive.

²¹ Kiss (1989). Polish excavations were carried out beginning in the 1960's. For analysis of the neighborhood (R4), see Haas (1997: 194).

²² Haas (1997). They could even be a form of knock-off souvenirs. In another vein, Anderson (2007b) has further explored the possible economic implications of the Menas corpus' distribution as far as Western Europe. He traces their appearance along known trade routes, often where other Egyptian pottery and crafts are present, implying that their presence relates to trade rather than exclusively to pilgrimage.

²³ For instance, Vicky Foskolou (2006: 60) has argued that *eulogiai* would have been given to pilgrims rather than sold at the shrine to subsidize complexes, arguing that the centers relied on donations to run; Cline (2014) also explores the economical implications of *eulogia* production by considering a two-sided limestone mold which may signify the off-site workshop production of multiple types of souvenirs (token in this case), to diverse religious traditions, suggesting a market-driven motivating factor in the production of the goods. See also Caner's (2006) article on the 'miraculous economy' of the fourth century.

Simeon's shrine at Qal'at Seman, where literary testimonies claim they were made.²⁴ Using scanning electron microscopy, the team found that none of their samples were closely related to any local clay near the shrine.²⁵ The Simeon tokens have also been discovered widely distributed geographically. These results complicate any unidirectional model of portable pilgrimage material culture.²⁶

Prior to the Polish excavations, the Menas flasks from Abu Mina offered the strongest case for onsite *eulogiai* manufacture. But since Kiss's excavations, the *locus sanctus* model can no longer account for the entirety of Menas flask production and distribution. This example, combined with the Simeon tokens, destabilizes monolithic notions of the pilgrimage "souvenir." While *eulogiai* were likely distributed at sites, they were not necessarily produced there. Therefore, this suggests that the Menas flasks' origins were not the main concern for producers or consumers – it appears that one could obtain them before or after a journey, as gifts, or as exchange commodities. They equally problematize assumptions concerning the relationship between a "souvenir" object and its iconography. These findings also introduce the strong possibility of *eulogiai* distribution to those who did not physically visit the *locus sanctus*. Given that the *locus sanctus*-production assumption no longer necessarily explains the production of the Menas corpus, by no means should it continue to influence interpretations of the Asia Minor ampullae.

The "Categoryness" of Ampullae

The Menas flasks and Asia Minor ampullae clearly share formal similarities. Yet a close comparison between corpora disassociates the Asia Minor group further from that of the Menas. The Menas corpus consists of a coherent group of miniaturized flasks with a relatively standardized iconography. Literary accounts, archaeology, and imagery, suggest that *eulogiai* carried away in these

²⁴ Gerard et al. (1997).

²⁵ Ibid. They identified three compositional groups, signaling that the clay sourcing was not entirely random.

²⁶ For which we have some literary testimony; Gregory of Tours stated the power of tokens produced from the tomb of Christ and the benefits of distributing them to those in need; for discussion see Vikan (2010: 41).

containers were typically drops of oil from the crypt.²⁷ Thus, the Menas flask was a specialized form developed purposely for *eulogia* collection, just as the extensive architectural complexes grew around the saint's shrine to accommodate travellers; this development has been projected onto the Asia Minor ampullae.²⁸ But the coherent formal, miniaturized properties of each respective corpus point to different independent trajectories.

The Menas flasks are moldmade, clay, and stamped with an image – most often the saint in an *orans* pose flanked by two camels. They tend to have a circular body, with thick walls, a defined flaring neck, and two articulated handles. They range from 6 – 14 centimeters in height and average 13 centimeters in diameter.²⁹ The Asia Minor ampullae, on the other hand, are oval, with thinner walls, a more stout neck, and two pierced holes for handles. They are also smaller, ranging from 3 – 8 centimeters in height, and from 2 – 5 centimeters in diameter. Thus, both draw from a formal “flask” type and exhibit salient features and affordances of “flaskness.” This shared type was present in various flask and ceramic forms in the Roman world as part of the wider visual community,³⁰ while various flask morphologies developed regionally in Egypt and Asia Minor. Metzger has proposed the Roman period gourd flasks as a precedent for the Menas flasks because of their similar shape.³¹ There are also parallels between Menas flasks and the Egyptian “new year” flasks, which celebrated the Nile's flooding. These too are small, round ceramic flasks, with a specialized ritual purpose.³² The Menas flasks' regional formal repertoire was adapted and miniaturized for ritual containment. Based on extensive archaeological excavations at

²⁷ Vikan (2010: 33); Grossman (1998: 285) rather than water from large cisterns on site.

²⁸ As well as the other types of ‘image-bearing blessings,’ such as the Simeon tokens and the Monza-Bobbio flasks from Palestine. See Vikan (2010: 31-40).

²⁹ Height according to Vikan (2010: 34); diameter Hunter-Crawley (2013: 190).

³⁰ Anderson (2004: 81). For example, mould-made interior glazed Pergamon flasks of the imperial period (the most well-known of which feature gladiatorial scenes) were thought to be portable wine containers.

³¹ Schlumbaum and Vidorpe (2011: 500) recognize one sub-species of bottle gourd in Roman Egypt. Mouldmade wine flasks were also produced in Egypt in Memphis and the Fayum in the pre-Christian era Anderson (2004: 81); Seif el-Din (1993) explores the ‘pilgrim's flask’ form in Greco-Roman Egypt. Interestingly, the salience of the Menas form has to come to mean any two-handled flask in the region; even those produced hundreds of years earlier (the two-handled flask form is thought to have first appeared in Egypt mid-Dynasty 18).

³² Bangert (2007: 32-33, 45).

Abu Mina and Alexandria, Kiss developed a typological chronology for the flasks from the late fifth century to the mid-seventh century, up until the Arab conquest in 642.³³

By contrast, an Asia Minor ampulla's oval, baggy shape recalls contemporary travelers' canteens or water skins.³⁴ Other flasks discovered in Asia Minor include the large, round "hip" flask found at Sardis, which has one flat side, to rest on a traveller's hip.³⁵ Wheel-made fusiform ampullae, which are slender, tall, and thick walled, often with a slip and stamped monograms on their flat bases are especially ubiquitous.³⁶ The fusiform type occurs more frequently than mold-made flasks. Yet, other mold-made terracotta objects from the region also inform the Asia Minor ampullae. Comparisons to mold-made lamps and terracotta figurines also strongly suggest a shared visual style with shared motifs (both Christian and non-Christian), stylistic details (faces and eyes rendered very similarly, for instance), and figural designs.³⁷ The ampullae may be given a loose date range from the middle of the sixth century to the early decades of the seventh.³⁸ Thus, while this corpus draws from a shared regional visual and material type, it appears for a concentrated time from approximately the sixth to seventh century with a specific form, suggesting its own specialized function.

Both container types show regional miniaturization of the flask form. But the Asia Minor ampullae need not be understood as derived from the Menas flasks – rather, their formal characteristics argue that they were developed independently. While the Menas corpus retains articulated handles, preserving a stronger similarity to drinking flasks, the Asia Minor ampulla form is more reduced – two pierced holes create "handles." This suggests that their shape and smaller size was functionally less connected to emptying their contents and more related to carrying or holding them.

³³ Kiss (1990: 196).

³⁴ Rautman (2005: 718) and Vikan (2010) suggests that this was a conscious emulation of the form, "themselves symbols of pilgrimage" arguing that the Asia Minor ampullae were the same form as traditional shape for oil containers, yet inefficient containers due to their constricted necks and characteristically poor quality of their sealing glaze (70).

³⁵ Hanfmann (1983: 165) describes one from the Byzantine shops; Greenwalt et al. (1994).

³⁶ Hayes referred to these as the "late Roman unguentarium," and gives a date range from the ca. 450 – 550 (1971: 244 – 47).

³⁷ See Bailey (1988: 394-395).

³⁸ Given the Persian sack of Sardis in 616 CE and ampullae found with coins minted in the mid-sixth century. Anderson (2004: 88); for discussion of the Persian sack see Rautman (2013).

The correlation between “contemporary functional labels” and the past use of ceramic containers is not always obvious or singular.³⁹ Just as our own vessels may not be limited to a single use – a souvenir mug from Disneyland may lend itself to holding coffee as well as office supplies – we can imagine that ancient ceramics could also be multifunctional. But there are certain material qualities of ampullae that lend themselves to some purposes more easily than others. The form lends itself to wearing or holding and, of course collecting the particles of sacred travel, such as drops of oil and water. But given an ampulla’s *material* make-up, these liquid-holding affordances are not immediately obvious. Ampullae are highly porous and unslipped on the interior. While this certainly does not exclude their capacity for and actual use holding liquids,⁴⁰ it does call into question their *intended* purpose and the temporal relationship between filling and emptying. It suggests that they were able to hold liquids for short periods of time in small quantities. These considerations indicate that while the dry body of an ampulla could potentially be filled with wet liquid contents, they would rarely be brimming.⁴¹ But ampullae also lent themselves to containing dry materials, which could include earth from a shrine (such as manna) as well as other dry, granular substances such as salts, spices, and medicines.⁴²

The Asia Minor corpus’s dimensions range widely (see Ill. 1). Working with the Sardis finds, I assembled four general sizes. The “standard,” which occurs most frequently, is about 7 cm high and 5 cm wide. The “standard plus,” which occur less often and feature thicker walls and more elaborate decoration, are about 8 cm high and 6 cm wide.⁴³ The “mid-size mini” is about 5 cm high and 4 cm wide. Finally, the “mini” is about 3 cm high and 2.5 cm wide.⁴⁴ Different sizes allow their users various possibilities. While the standard size could be comfortably held in an adult’s hand (Ill. 5), the mini could

³⁹ As Van Oyen argues for terra sigillata (2016: 11).

⁴⁰ I thank Astrid Van Oyen for finally clearing this up for me. While experimentation with a Sardis ampulla does suggest highly porous terracotta (which absorbs water quickly), this does not exclude their use for such containment, especially given suggestions that pilgrim’s would collect drops of oil rather than fill them to capacity.

⁴¹ See Gaifman (2013) for the wet and dry materiality of ceramic production and containment and Hunter-Crawley (2013) on the *imagined* transformation from dry to wet in the containment of the Menas corpus.

⁴² For the magical, apotropaic functions of spices in late antiquity, see Pollard (2013).

⁴³ These two sizes are typically associated with the corpus; Vikan calls the Asia Minor ampullae to be “about the size of a small flattened pear” (2010: 35).

⁴⁴ All four groupings range +/- 1 cm.

also be clutched in an adult's fist, or grasped comfortably by a child. Alternatively, the smaller sizes offer a lighter object to be worn around a traveller's neck or tucked into a garment.



Illustration 5. Author holding a “standard” size Asia Minor ampulla.

While the size variations may cater to individuals' preferences, they all collectively speak to the group's cohesive formal presence. An ampulla's size range implies the salience of its form and significance in late antiquity. As Susan Stewart has shown, miniaturization helps bound a corpus through its powerful concentration, as the “reduction of physical dimensions results in a multiplication of ideological properties.”⁴⁵ In order to be miniaturized, the objects' form must already be efficacious. The Asia Minor corpus is thus a particular late antique form of ceramic containment, informed by specialized containers (“flaskness”) and visual motifs produced through the techniques of mold-made ceramics.⁴⁶ While the ampullae retain their relationship to containment and travel, they also allowed personal handling in the form of wearing or holding. Thus, it is likely that the Asia Minor corpus was developed as a regional flask adaptation for specialized containment, based on its formal boundedness rather than iconographical symbols, and are likely to be linked to sacred travel in late antiquity.

Iconographic Development

⁴⁵ Stewart (1990: 44).

⁴⁶ Re-coupling typology and technology, in the terms of Knappett et al. (2010), who explore containment in ceramics as metaphor and function. In regards to Neo-lithic ceramics: “Containers are not simply vessels but action possibilities that bring forth new forms of mediated action, agency, and material engagement, both in terms of use and manufacture” (591).

Whereas the Menas corpus exhibits a standardized iconography, the Asia Minor ampullae reveal a much wider range of decoration, forcefully indicating their independent trajectory as a corpus. Kiss's relatively recent Menas flask hoard from Alexandria (142 ampullae, including fragments) generates an important chronological framework via stratigraphy and iconography for Menas flasks, and destabilizes the monolithic *locus sanctus* production model. The findings in Alexandria suggest that the flasks were collected, exchanged, or even produced away from the saint's shrine. Kiss also developed an important iconographic chronology, showing that the Menas images became more standard over time. The "middle phase" (ca. 560 – 610) displays great iconographical variety, including images of other local saints (such as St. Thecla), ships, stars, and Greek inscriptions usually reading "Eulogia of Menas," whereas the images of the later "active phase" (ca. 610 – 650) become more consistent with the saint in *orans*, with a camel on either side, encircled by a frame of dots. Today this is known as the typical Menas iconography (Ill. 4).⁴⁷ Over time this suggests that standardized iconography authenticated the Menas flasks, rather than onsite production. No such trend transfers over to the Asia Minor ampullae.

Because the earlier diverse phase of Menas images correlates more closely to the images preserved on Asia Minor ampullae, and given that there was some type of exchange of pilgrim's flasks in Asia Minor, one could argue that the Asia Minor flasks were derived from those of the Menas type – as a later local adaptation, they were active for a shorter period of time and thus were not able to "mature" and standardize in the same way as the Menas corpus. In this hypothesis, one frequently occurring image type (such as the Evangelist type), derived from a singular center of production (such as the shrine of saint John at Ephesus), *should have* eventually won out as the uniform iconography. This hypothesis is both accidental and deterministic – it assumes that one type of iconography *should* win out based on its connections to one *locus sanctus* and *must* win out to render a culturally significant meaning. However, the substantial formal and visual differences between corpora cannot sustain such a hypothesis. Each corpus shows its own iconographic trajectory. Over time the images of Saint Menas in *orans* between two

⁴⁷ Kiss (1990: 196). Davis (1998) argued that the images of saint Thecla on Menas ampullae, though her main shrine was in Isauria, was generated through competition of the two saint's presence in the area.

camels became standardized and widely produced/distributed, “authenticating” objects in relation to the saint’s shrine at Abu Mina. But the diverse images on the Asia Minor ampullae do not suggest that they should have developed an authenticating iconography connected to a single pilgrimage site, but rather, that the objects were *doing* altogether different things.

The Asia Minor corpus shows local adaptation. The diversity of images and molds, which could make an infinite number of combinations, was appealing to a wide number of people in the region. Metzger organized the Louvre collection into ten iconographic categories; these included crosses, people under arches, standing saints and Evangelists, horsemen, busts, floral or vegetal motifs, shells, people with books, animals, and one special head type. The cross type was the most frequently occurring category (18), doubling the next category of people under arches (9). I have compiled the catalogued Sardis ampullae (around 60) into similar categories. These include floral, vegetal, and animal motifs, crosses, mixed identified and unidentified saints, dots and circles, shells, people under arches, and people with books. Four ampullae were unspecified, undecorated, or too fragmentary to sort. The floral, vegetal and animal motifs were the most frequently occurring category (20),⁴⁸ followed closely by the crosses (17). Despite the previous attention paid to saint types, very few can be identified as individual holy people without doubt.⁴⁹ These two groups together – the Louvre’s unprovenanced group and my own compiled from the Sardis excavations – show that the dominant image types were non-figural (crosses) and non-human (vegetation and animals). These quantified iconographical categories move attention away from the *identification* of singular figures. But such quantifying can raise issues as well. Because the objects are made from two different molds, any single classification can be misleading when one side

⁴⁸ I combined Metzger’s two categories of ‘floral and vegetal’ and ‘animal’ because the images occurred frequently together. For ampullae that I was not able to examine myself, I followed the descriptions recorded on the Sardis database.

⁴⁹ For the entire corpus, not just the Sardis group. For instance, a few flasks in the Louvre of a man’s bust with a book identify the figure as Andrew with incised Greek letters, Metzger (1981: 49-50, nos. 123-125), though Campbell (1998) asserts the since the inscriptions were added later, all the ‘bust’ ampullae may have been generic ‘saints,’ until a purchaser requested a specific holy person. One figure with keys has been identified as St. Peter, while a figure in a boat as St. Phocas, Anderson (2007a: 20). One ampulla from Sardis with two figures, one small and one larger, has been tentatively identified as the Virgin and child, and another with a donkey and globe, as Christ’s entry into Egypt, Hanfmann (1983). Other figures, which appear to stand under arches and between beasts have been tentatively identified as individual saints and martyrs, for example, ampulla from Knidos with a woman between two lions have been identified as St. Thecla, Love (1972: 61-76).

does not correlate exactly to the other. Methodologically, in the Sardis corpus whenever there was a combination of figural and non-figural images, I listed the object under “figural,” which emphasizes the sheer quantity of non-figural and non-human designs present among the corpus. Though the non-figural “dot” and “concentric circle” category contains only seven ampullae, these are flasks that *exclusively* feature these designs – almost all cross motifs and many figural images incorporate concentric circles.

Overall, the generic nature of the figural images instead reveals the interrelations amongst the corpus and other everyday objects. The generality of both the figural and non-figural images are striking. This generality allows owners to personalize their flasks through filling or even naming images of figures after purchase.⁵⁰ More resounding is their potential to function as apotropaic objects, displaying often vegetation and animals, crosses, and concentric circles like many other daily domestic objects, as Dauterman-Maguire et al. have shown.⁵¹ Rather than connecting ampullae to single sacred sites in Asia Minor, the corpus’ iconography suggests market-driven generality related to powerful recurring motifs found on other late antique household objects.

Table 2. *Asia Minor Type Ampullae: Sardis Iconography*

Iconographic Type	Number of Ampullae
Floral, vegetal, animal motifs	20
Crosses	17
Identified and unidentified saints	7
Non-figural (dots, circles)	7
Unspecified/fragmentary/undecorated	4

⁵⁰ See fn. 49.

⁵¹ Dauterman-Maguire et al. (1989: 5-7; 9-13; 18-22). They draw attention to motifs in the domestic arts including those that are protective designs, including concentric circles, those that invoke prosperity, such as creatures and plants, and Christian designs, such as the cross. All motifs occur frequently (they note that in the early Christian household, crosses especially were found everywhere) and on a variety of media including combs and small personal items, jewelry, lamps, lamp stands, pectoral crosses, and various forms of architecture (such as the three concentric circles carved on the lintel of a sixth-century fort in Umm el-Jimal). While motifs such as concentric circles could indicate a variety of potential functions (not to mention the ease to which the design could be carved or stamped), they could symbolize animating features, such as eyes, or could represent the shine of jewels on metal objects, such as crosses. The authors also argue that the circle motif became a sign of the mirror in the Early Christian period, which also offered protective powers. The combination of concentric circles on crosses was frequent; again, some could stand in for jewels on metal crosses, while others may have enhanced the protective power of the cross itself (21-22). Crosses in particular became ubiquitous in our historical moment – in addition to protecting architectural spaces, the authors draw attention to the personal protective powers of the cross that were performed in crossing oneself (described by authors such as Cyril of Alexandria and James of Sarûg of the fifth and sixth centuries, respectively), while material crosses were worn as jewelry, amulets, earrings, and clothing, as well as integrated into the kitchen and other living spaces of the house, including strainers, and impressed on the stoppers of jars (19-21).

Shells	3
People under arch/architecture	2
People with books	1

The comparison of these two flask corpora helps to rethink the causes underlying each group's trajectory – neither the Menas flasks nor the Asia Minor ampullae began as homogenous categories.⁵² Rather, the Menas corpus developed into such a homogenous category through concrete practices of making such as modeling, molding, and firing, combined with their iconographical significance created through the processes of standardization, all of which were magnified by production and market forces. The Menas flasks' standardized iconography and widespread distribution signals that in this case, a recognizable “sign” of pilgrimage was desirable. But we can no longer rely on the Menas corpus's trajectory to explain the Asia Minor ampullae. Instead, we can apply the same *type* of questions and considerations of practical and conceptual developments to understand the Asia Minor ampulla's diverse imagery and formal salience (through miniaturization) as desirable in local markets. Moreover, though crosses appear very frequently in the Sardis collection, many ampullae feature motifs that are not explicitly “religious” or “Christian.” Daily, possibly apotropaic motifs link the diverse images more explicitly than strictly Christian or any one saint's imagery, which, contrary to the *formal* boundedness of ampullae, extends and connects the assemblage to other household objects, highlighting the various targeted choices made by the producers of ampullae. The shared visual motifs and style amongst lamps, figural terracottas, and ampullae substantiate the important combination of portable objects and impressed images in late antique domestic space. Examination of the Asia Minor corpus' archaeological contexts helps to further support these iconographic findings. Distribution patterns, albeit spotty, suggest the place for this new container in the wider visual and material *koine* of Asia Minor.

Archaeological Contexts

⁵² Van Oyen (2016: 57).

Archaeological assemblages pose challenges for interpretation, but cautious quantification of context categories argues for the importance of the multifunctional and domestic nature of findspots, closely connected to the economic conditions of Asia Minor. Ampullae findspots and context categories are summarized in tables 3 and 4. They come from a number of geographic locations in the eastern Mediterranean, but are concentrated in western Asia Minor. Diverse findspots and mixed recording practices pose great interpretative challenges. As Anderson has noted, ampullae occur in places where archaeologists dig; that is, ancient cities rather than rural settlements.⁵³ In such rich sites there are many ceramic fragments, and ampullae fragments may be mistaken for lamps or other terracotta objects or, more likely, they will be deemed too small to be typologically diagnostic or artistically valuable. Broken sherds make it challenging to account for the number of lost fragments and to conclude on the frequency of the ampullae. Many interesting ceramics may be preserved from significant contexts (and thus the archaeologist will use this ceramic evidence to more accurately date the context) but specialists will rarely see them. For example, at Sardis, such pottery from 2015 excavations of a fascinating late Roman trench⁵⁴ contained several fragments of Asia Minor ampullae, none of which were catalogued for study. These considerations (combined with publishing challenges) mean that this quantifiable data (tables 3 and 4) is not only limited, but also it under-represents the ubiquity of these miniaturized flasks in urban sites.⁵⁵

Table 3. *Asia Minor Type Ampullae: Published Geographic Find spots*

Site	Number of Ampullae
Aphrodisias	21
Sardis	12
Pergamon	7
Ephesus	4
Knidos	3
Silven	3
Antioch	2
Phocaea	1
Didyma	1
Samos	1

⁵³ Anderson (2004: 85).

⁵⁴ Known as F55, perhaps a late Roman elite domestic complex which was built from the former Wadi B temple.

⁵⁵ Anderson reported over 40 ampullae were excavated from Aphrodisias from personal correspondence with Christopher Ratté. At Sardis, around 60 ampullae or ampulla fragments are catalogued (either as ‘ampulla’ or ‘pilgrim’s flask’ or ‘flask;’) I examined closely 20 ampullae during the 2016 field season.

Athens	1
Caričin Grad	1
Jerusalem	1

Table 4. *Asia Minor Type Ampullae: Context categories*

Context	Number of Ampullae
Residential	16
Religious	14
Other	13
Funerary	6
Commercial	6

Given these challenges, it is next to impossible to know how common these mass-produced ceramics were in sites where we only have one recorded find (Didyma, Samos, Phocaea, and Athens, for example). But ampullae were ubiquitous in late Roman Western Asia Minor cities of Sardis and Aphrodisias, both of which are geographically situated inland, and their deposit contexts give us a glimpse of their consumption from the end of their use-lives. Considering production parameters and deposits helps to further deconstruct monolithic assumptions about pilgrimage souvenirs. As table 4 makes clear, the context categories are quite diverse, but may be organized into residential, religious, funerary, and commercial contexts.⁵⁶ These are mainly architectural classifications; for example, three ampullae found in the former temple of Aphrodite at Knidos are counted in the “religious” category.⁵⁷ I build on these categories of classification, however, I am mindful of their limitations as many objects were found in single, even disturbed contexts.

Firstly, the commercial contexts are somewhat consistent with the patterns already outlined, specifically in terms of *eulogiai* and wider late antique economic trends in the eastern Mediterranean. Three ampullae from the Byzantine shops at Sardis provide such a commercial context, suggesting that the ampullae may have been sold as commodities in the district. But the shops were part of a multi-functional, urban residential quarter from the early fifth to the late sixth century. They lay in a prominent

⁵⁶ Building on Anderson’s (2004) synthesis. The ‘other’ category signifies unclear circumstances or unspecified contexts – in one case, two ampullae published from the late Roman well in Sardis provides a clear deposit with other late Roman pottery, but it is unclear whether the well was a rubbish fill or even a ritual deposit – see Rautman (1996).

⁵⁷ Love (1972: 75).

street side location along the south side of the bath-gymnasium complex and synagogue behind the city's main road's north portico.⁵⁸ While the main levels of the twenty units were suitable for retail and household industry, indicated by specialized assemblages,⁵⁹ the upper levels allowed for storage and domestic spaces, indicated by household wares. Just as the shops themselves may not easily be categorized, it is difficult to assign a solely commercial context to these ampullae over individual ownership, either as commodities or personal possessions.⁶⁰ Indeed, we can describe the quarters more accurately as homes with small businesses owned by industrious members of the middle class.⁶¹ Still, this context is important for highlighting the mercantile potential of ampullae in western Asia Minor cities.⁶² As Rautman suggests, "these similarities point to a broad convergence of habitation and production at the household level in the late sixth and early seventh centuries."⁶³ This archaeological example supports the "productive and commercial middle classes" of late antiquity, which generally indicate commercial domestication and privatization.⁶⁴ Given that the shops at Sardis were destroyed in 616 CE, they also provide a rare *terminus ante quem* for the corpus.

Furthermore, the prevalence of residential and religious contexts yielding flasks is also striking. Anderson has already tried to connect flask depositions with Christian votive customs.⁶⁵ He especially tries to suggest that "religious deposits" and especially those found at "ancient sites", such as those found

⁵⁸ Rautman (2013: 21). Uniformity and prominent placement suggests that municipal authorities built the shops, modified by leasers.

⁵⁹ Ibid., (22). Assemblages that support units for food preparation, cloth dying, and other material recycling. Household wares, tools, and personal effects similar to those found in the shops are found generally in domestic contexts at the site.

⁶⁰ Cf. Wallace-Hadrill (1994) and Laurence (2007: 143-144) on the close relationship between houses and shops in Pompeii.

⁶¹ Banaji (2015: 5). Interestingly, Crawford (1990: 38, 56, 87) reports that the three shops in which the ampullae were found appear to have been two dyer shops (E5 and E14), based on objects such as steelyards, basins, and other vessels, and another which was a apparently a restaurant (W2). The ampulla found in W2 was found in a collapsed upper level, most likely the owner's residence, and prompting Crawford (18, 38) to suggest the owner was a Christian. E5, where another ampulla was found along with a brass-lion lamp, iron sword, a large pottery flask decorated with a Latin cross and jumping rabbits, and a moldmade ampulla decorated with concentric circles, was the "richest shop excavated" (ibid., 56).

⁶² In Aphrodisias, the Sebasteion was also converted into a commercial shop area, where other ampullae have been discovered. See Erism (1986: 103-23); Anderson (2004: 87).

⁶³ Rautman (2013: 22)

⁶⁴ Banaji (2015: 5).

⁶⁵ Anderson (2007a).

in Knidos at the Hellenistic sanctuary were an “adoption” or “adaptation” of ancient votive practices pertaining to lamps. An ampulla discovered under a doorjamb in the Southwest gate of the city wall in Sardis is another example of a possible votive practice.⁶⁶ Many contexts could potentially support this votive interpretation. Just as Menas ampullae found at the saint’s shrine suggest the possibility of votive or thank offerings, rather than the pilgrim’s need to “take away” the flasks, the Asia Minor ampullae may have afforded ritual deposition in thanks for healing, protection, or safe passage.

Kim Bowes has shown the role of domestic space in intense debates surrounding Christian sacred space in the late antiquity, reintegrating the household as a “persistent social habit.”⁶⁷ She argues that the Christian household became private for the first time – a place of devotion and accusations of heresy. Though she constrains her study to the fourth and fifth centuries, I suggest that ampullae in domestic contexts speak to the continuation of the household as a meta-structure of social habit and private devotion: “the space of the home likewise continued to serve as a potent, but highly controversial moral container.”⁶⁸ Devotion, in the form of private prayer in the home, as dangerous as it was to early Church authorities, continued in Christian households. Like pagan and Jewish practices, material objects were activated; for example, lamp lighting was integrated into the home as a form of private devotion and daily practice, often in front of devotional images.⁶⁹

Anderson compares lamps and ampullae because they are a) found together in some deposits and b) both found at ancient religious sites and signal to him ritual use. I argue their relationship runs deeper – ampullae also provide comparable tangible engagements. As noted above, ampullae and lamps share some key visual and material features – they are both image-bearing, mold-made, terracotta objects with

⁶⁶ Hanfmann (1975: 47).

⁶⁷ Bowes (2008: 222).

⁶⁸ Ibid., (226). She traces the developments in the eastern empire, while less pronounced than in the west, still show changes towards the private. The Council of Chalcedon especially marks a ‘watershed’ moment in growing episcopal control – whereby she sees elite private individuals ‘imitate a language of power’ of the bishops. Yet the persistence of private worship continues in conflict and new reiterations of elite ideology (224).

⁶⁹ Ibid., (54). Also a plural religious habit: “The origins of the rituals, whether Jewish or Christian, are less important than their ubiquity, and Christian homes would have sparkled with the ritual lamps of evening alongside their pagan and Jewish neighbors.”

inherently utilitarian affordances. The images on both lamps and ampullae are largely comparable.⁷⁰ Furthermore, a traceable trend in terracotta production from the fourth century onwards suggests that figural terracottas, often with stylistic similarities to ampullae, were more often produced with other ceramic vessels; the coroplasts' embodied knowledge was shared, or even subsumed in the late antique workshop.⁷¹ Given the corpus's formal trajectory as miniaturized terracotta flasks, production was *new* in its formal specifications, but the embodied knowledge and technology for such production already existed, and was likely adopted in these same multifunctional workshops. All three of these local terracotta types are tangible, multifunctional objects, which, by means of their intimate scale and tangible qualities, afford personal experience and suggest collective attitudes towards private devotion. So while we may divide the flasks' findspots into categories, such as "commercial" and "religious", the multifunctional nature of these late antique spaces in which they are found and the domestication of their production further implies their potential use in daily spaces and practices.

Residential contexts: Domestic devotion

The shared commonalities of context categories suggest that ampullae are found most often in multi-functional domestic spaces belonging to a range of owners who were moderately affluent to elite. These commonalities imply the domesticated production of the ampulla form. Yet the flask form itself gestures towards on-the-go containment, while its miniaturization allows for intimate handling. Having reconsidered the conditions of production, I turn to the reception of ampullae. The emphasis moves away from the authenticity of production to the recipients of the objects – domestic and votive find spots suggest a sense of possession and objectified embodiment.

It is helpful to return to the ampulla's formal connection to travel, as a small portable flask, and its potential relationship to pilgrimage practices. The growth of the cult of the saints, whose burial sites

⁷⁰ See Bailey (1988: 394-395) for lamps from Sardis and (324-395) from Asia Minor more generally. These late antique lamps are simplified in this period, with images of vines and grapes, and crosses prevalent similar to the Sardis ampullae.

⁷¹ Gallart Marqués (2015).

were believed to be imbued with sanctity, tangibly contested the “fundamental and oft-repeated” biblical promises of God’s ubiquity in all places: the saint’s power was concentrated at sacred places, physical objects, and holy particles.⁷² The ampulla’s miniaturized flask form, which was likely *developed* to contain sacred particles, was portable and often protective, (whether by containing sacred particles or simply bearing apotropaic images), and invokes the local embodied experiences of travel and devotion. Their intimate scale and protective motifs lend them to manipulation in times of stress or gratitude, conjuring images of wary travelers setting out for a journey abroad or returning safely home. On these journeys, ampullae may have actively participated in the material and spiritual nodes of pilgrimage, as critical agents for collecting sacred *eulogiai*.⁷³ However, more than any other interpretation, the number of ampullae found in residential and votive contexts suggests their devotional value to owners.⁷⁴ This possession was akin to that of prolific terracotta lamps, both multifunctional and devotional.

Although it is no longer necessary to connect Asia Minor ampullae with specific sacred sites and appropriate iconography, their miniaturized form still gestures to practices of travel and devotion. Rather than strict souvenir mementoes or pious badges to a specific saint or place, they become signs of social religious practice more generally because of their formal sacred associations; their “flaskness” and intimate dimensions conjure experiences of movement, whether over short or long distances. Apotropaic and even Christian imagery visually signal their safeguarding abilities. Combined, their intimate scale and impressed protective images gesture more explicitly to their affective force as personal devotional objects. Once freed from the strict boundaries of specific *loca sancta*, ampullae may function within a broader field of personal practice. This loosening of the ampulla’s function parallels several other forms of ancient

⁷² Bowes (2008: 220).

⁷³ From a numbers of ‘sacred sites’ be they local themselves, or from dominant regional sites, such as Aya Tecla and St. John at Ephesus, or along the Holy Land routes. A Christian could go abroad to visit a particular holy place (*locus sanctus*) the next town over, or they could cross the Mediterranean in order to be in the presence of a living holy man. Pilgrims wished to travel to the places in Byzantine Palestine associated with Christ’s life, ministry and death, as well sites in Egypt, Asia Minor, Syria and Greece to visit those sites which bridged heaven and Earth through God’s intercessors – the saints. For the development and diversity in practices, see Brown (2014) and Elsner and Rutherford (2005).

⁷⁴ Many ampullae were discovered in elite ‘residential’ contexts, sometimes amongst other materially valuable objects, such as bronze vessels and liturgical objects in the House of Bronzes at Sardis, suggest their possession was *personally* active and valuable. See Hanfmann (1985: 422) for Sardis and Campbell (1988) for Aphrodisias.

media in devotional contexts.⁷⁵ Loosening the interpretative framework allows ampullae to occupy a (re)negotiated position between ritualized travel and daily experience. As emblems of safe movement and protected devotion, they compel new understandings beyond the propagation of single saints' shrines.

An ampulla may have offered ritual or votive function(s) or a mediating presence in private prayer to ancient users; its form marks a protective possession. Findspots generally signal that owners regarded ampullae as valuable and even religiously charged, in the case of votive deposits.⁷⁶ These small ceramic containers, discovered within the household "meta-container," may have also facilitated domestic devotion. Whether they were cherished keepsakes, repurposed salt and spice containers, or votive deposits, their intimate scale and impressed images expounds personal sacred meanings.

Conclusion: Re-materializing Asia Minor Ampullae

Deposit contexts present significant parameters, offering shared commonalities of consumption spaces and social meanings. Given these archaeological assemblages, unidirectional and monolithic models are not helpful for analyzing Asia Minor ampullae. Rather, it is far more effective to analyze their movement – from creation to deposition – as potentially multidirectional. As a locally adapted ceramic form in Asia Minor, the ampulla's place in both economic and domestic spaces allows a multiplicity of social meanings. They should be imagined as commodities and negotiators of domestic devotion, and even collectors of sacred *eulogiai*. Thus, an ampulla may be obtained before, during, or after sacred travel, whether directly or indirectly. I consider here the implications of this multidirectional hypothesis on the material agency of ampullae through the course of their use lives. This requires a way to approach

⁷⁵ Gaifman (2013) argues that Greek (fifth century B.C.) white-ground kylixes that took the form of drinking cups but their white-ground techniques suggest that they were not made for drinking or holding liquids. Rather, they are found often in votive and sometimes funerary contexts, suggesting they were made for some religious or ritual function. But the dry kylix form still conjures experience of liquid encounters (with wine and through the images of Apollo's libation in one example). White-ground libation bowls offer a similar situation; while their form gestures at the practices of libation, their delicate white-ground techniques may suggest that they were also created for another ritual or funerary function; Gaifman (2006) examines the replication of miniaturized Greek cult images, which still gesture towards the power of the "original" cult statue, but outside of the space and rituals of the cult's shrine replications were embedded in daily experience.

⁷⁶ See fn. 61 for an example of other valuable objects found with ampullae, and the general affluent middle class of owners. Though we do not find them in large "votive" hoards as we do with lamps, several single deposits suggest votive practice (Anderson 2007a).

these material things without the absolute locative conditions of the *locus sanctus*. Rather than engaging Vikan's models of contagion and sacred mimesis, for an archaeological analysis it is far more helpful to employ Hunter-Crawley's concept of infinite divinity. This concept helps further free ampullae from standard "souvenir" explanations, which prioritize iconography, literary sources, and two-dimensional analyses.

Hunter-Crawley argues that material things unlocked divine access, connecting Heaven and Earth through experience and ritual. However related to the saints or Christ an object or image was, "the 'original' in this context is not a finite thing (such as the True Cross), but a 'type' (the cross as 'symbolon')," which is revealed infinitely through ritual practice.⁷⁷ Thus for example, when collecting oil from lamps at St. Thecla's shrine, pilgrims did not worry about the authenticity of the oil replaced, but rather granted that her healing powers were constantly revealed through collection and application practices.

Following this model of infinite divinity, ampullae can be understood within a continuous system of repetition and revelation. As containers adapted to contain sacred particles and often bearing powerful apotropaic images, they *could* offer mnemonic devices for pilgrims who used them for this purpose. But could they also offer a concrete connection between the heavenly and earthly realms through their very *potential* to act as *eulogiai*, as small hollow containers that could be filled with sacred particles at any future moment? In my multidirectional hypothesis, an ampulla's close association to collection rituals may have allowed users, both pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike, to share in their power of revelation through their local activation and formal salience in Asia Minor.

Exploring the material affordances of ampullae as hollow, pierced, and replicable objects further suggests their potential to reveal divinity to their late antique owners. Ampullae were mass produced objects, shaped with reusable molds. This process lends itself to wide distribution and allows for comparisons with other mundane, malleable, replicable, and impressed objects in late antiquity. While I

⁷⁷ Hunter-Crawley (2012: 151); this also has implications for the economic side of ampullae, as bits of distributed divinity. See Caner (2006).

have already compared the corpus to lamps and figural terracottas, I add stamped bread as a further comparison. Impressions (often the cross) were stamped on to malleable dough, and subsequently imbued with twofold power; blessed and distributed at shrines of saints, festivals, *loca sancta*, and integrated into the liturgy, they carried the power of the bishop's blessing, but also the "semiological force" of their distinguishing impressions – relevant images and symbols which imparted authenticating value on an ephemeral loaf.⁷⁸ Comparing to impressions on bread allows us to consider the semiological power of both stamps and images on mass-produced, "mundane" terracotta objects. The processes of molding and stamping effectively authenticate these things into more powerfully charged objects. Impressed images such as crosses, vegetation and animals, and concentric circles on most ampullae may have provided apotropaic powers or invoked prosperity.⁷⁹ The distributive affordances of mass-produced bread and ampullae allow for the efficacy of stamped images and forms to be shared repeatedly.⁸⁰

Ampullae invariably were pierced on either side of their shoulders, suggesting that they were worn around the neck as a form of personal adornment. This potential use emphasizes the physicality of an ampulla; hanging from an owner's neck would feel the material weight of the object against his or her own body. Again, the shape and size of the standard 7 cm ampulla allows an adult to hold it comfortably in one hand. The lentoid shaped fits neatly within the curve of the palm as the fingers wrap around the impressed images. While holding an ampulla would obscure the images and the visual power of the impressions, it also would generate new sensations and closely connect the user to any divine revelation through the sense of touch. The shape of the ampulla further compounds its connection to touch. Its lentoid shape does not lend itself well to independent display; laying on its side it will roll awkwardly (as seen in the Ephesus museum display, Ill. 1). They lend themselves much more easily to being carried, either suspended on the owner or in their hands, warming in response to the body. The objects depend

⁷⁸ Platt (2006: 239). And see Kumler (2011) on the serial power of the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, who links the multiplication of the Eucharistic wafer to the "infinite repetition" of the medieval Christian culture.

⁷⁹ See fn. 51. Impressed images also map on nicely to Neo-platonic Christian metaphors of the soul being "stamped" by experience.

⁸⁰ Because bread was distributed in different ways, the proliferation of these images and symbols would increase the potential shared visual community of Christian stamps in general, increasing their own semiological force.

heavily on human engagement and even force their carrying. This re-introduces temporal questions – once bought or introduced into a domestic space, how long would they remain there? Would they be activated in private devotion repeatedly, maintained for healing or protective purposes, or immediately deposited in a votive ritual? These options are available and dependent on individual owners and household preferences. However, the formal, physical presences of ampullae afford a kinesthetic experience, begging to be touched.

Ampullae may also produce sound by the swishing or shaking its contents, but more likely through stories from vendors, gift-givers, or pilgrims themselves sharing anecdotes of travel. I suggest that they also induce prayer in a domestic context. Finally, as hollow containers, ampullae allow their small bodies to be filled. Though no material residue analysis has been done on the corpus, they may have contained drops of oil and water, or dust, or other granular materials, such as medicines and spices. Their presence as hollow containers means they could repeatedly be filled and emptied with healing and protective substances. These affordances highlight the physical presence of ampullae and their potential uses and activations from creation to deposition in their regional context. I suggest that re-materializing ampullae emphasizes the embodied and devotional relationships revealing infinite divinity to their owners.

No longer conflating flask corpora or using them to illustrate static trends of pilgrimage *visual* culture, this study emphasizes archaeological avenues to analyze ampullae in their own right as tactile portable objects. Close formal, visual, and archaeological analysis disassociates the Asia Minor ampullae from the Menas corpus. While these corpora share formal similarities as miniaturized flasks, they indicate independent material and social trajectories. The Asia Minor corpus offers an alternative multidirectional understanding related to sacred travel and devotion, signaled by their intimate and protective form. Re-materializing ampullae asserts their physical power to reveal infinite divinity and explores their potential to frame and be framed by embodied personal devotion in the household. Beyond two-dimensional categorization, these very tactile ampullae nuance our narratives of sacred travel and enrich our understanding of personal piety in late antique Asia Minor.

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